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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JERUSALEM 000574

SIPDIS

NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE AND IPA. NSC FOR SHAPIRO/PASCUAL

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/22/2024
TAGS: [IS](#) [KPAL](#) [KWBG](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [SCUL](#)
SUBJECT: ISRAELI POLICE SHUT DOWN EAST JERUSALEM CULTURAL
EVENTS

REF: 08 JERUSALEM 2119

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles, per reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. Israeli National Police (INP) prevented several Palestinian cultural events from taking place in East Jerusalem on March 21-26. These events were part of the Arab League's "Arab Cultural Capital" (ACC) program. Local contacts said that not all of these cultural events received Arab League (AL) or PA funding, and that the GoI's actions would reduce Jerusalemites' access to cultural events. The Jerusalem Municipality distanced itself from the police actions, pointing out that they were a GoI decision. ACC events in Palestinian cities in the West Bank took place without interference. End Summary.

INP CLOSES POSSIBLE ACC VENUES, DETAINS ORGANIZERS

¶2. (C) The INP closed several East Jerusalem venues during March 21-26, and detained community leaders after announcing March 20 that events connected to the ACC program are illegal. On March 21, the INP searched two Palestinian community centers and one school in East Jerusalem, closing the venues on suspicion that community leaders intended to host ACC events, according to Emad Jaouny, Director of the Burj al-Laqlaq community center in the Old City's Muslim Quarter. Jaouny told PolOff March 23 that the closure order he received at Burj al-Laqlaq ("the Burj") was signed by Israeli Minister of Internal Security Avi Dichter and accused the PA of operating in East Jerusalem in breach of Israeli law and the Oslo Accords. Jaouny said the Burj received no PA or AL funding for its planned March 21 event, although he had intended to distribute ACC T-shirts. Jaouny said the INP visited the Burj at least five times March 21 to ensure no events took place.

¶3. (C) Jaouny said he was questioned about his connections with the PA and his involvement in ACC events for three hours at a police station. He confirmed reports that PM Fayyad's Advisor for Jerusalem Issues, Hatem Abdul Qader, and others were also detained and questioned. He said event organizers were required to sign agreements that they would not be involved in ACC events. The INP confiscated ACC materials, including T-shirts, posters, and at least one computer from various venues.

JAOUNY: ISRAELI CLOSURES WILL REDUCE
PALESTINIAN CULTURAL LIFE THIS YEAR

¶4. (C) Jaouny said that the Burj's March 21 event was a Mothers' Day celebration and only marginally linked to ACC festivities. He said that he asked the PA's ACC Chairman, Rafiq Hussein, not to announce the Burj as an ACC venue, but that Hussein ignored the request. He said that many regularly scheduled Palestinian cultural events this year

will sport the ACC logo as a matter of national pride, even if they receive no PA or AL funding. He said the GoI's strict interpretation of PA activities in East Jerusalem will reduce access to cultural events there.

15. (C) Among other events, the INP stopped a group of students from releasing balloons on the Mount of Olives March 21, and prevented a group of several hundred students from carrying flags onto the al-Aqsa compound/Temple Mount. They broke up a Mothers' Day gathering at St. George's School that same day. On March 23, the INP demolished a protest tent in Shaykh Jarrah where the head of Israel's Islamic Movement, Raed Salah, was scheduled to speak at an ACC event. Salah was detained, along with several others, including international activists.

MUNICIPALITY: GOI RESPONSIBLE FOR CLOSURES

16. (C) Yakir Segev, the Jerusalem City Council member responsible for East Jerusalem affairs, told PolOff that the Municipality would allow Palestinians to hold cultural events in East Jerusalem as long as they complied with municipal regulations and obtained permits. In response to PolOff's question on March 24, a Municipality representative said that the decision to close ACC events was made by the GoI, not the Municipality.

ACC EVENTS OCCUR IN WEST BANK WITHOUT INTERFERENCE

17. (C) PDOff attended an event in the Bethlehem suburb of

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al-Khader March 21 to kick off ACC festivities. President Abbas spoke, and three performances were broadcast to the venue from different sites around Jerusalem, including a muezzin, a choir singing the Palestinian national anthem, and a dance troupe. As of March 27, the GoI had not interfered with ACC events in Bethlehem, Hebron, Nablus, or Ramallah.
WALLES